

## Apprenticeship approach

Many experienced practitioners have questioned the traditional, behavioural approach to teaching reading. Waterland (1988) came to the conclusion that an apprenticeship approach, in which the child is an active partner in the reading process with a supportive adult, would be more productive. She contends that the most important element of learning to read is the child's engagement with the material, and that selection of appropriate texts should be a cooperative venture where the adult acts as a 'guiding friend' (Waterland 1988: 16) so that the child is not too challenged by their choice. This requires the careful selection of a wide range of texts for every nursery and early years classroom. Rather than listening to children read, the adult *shares* the book with the child. To begin with, the adult reads the book to the child, but on subsequent readings the child takes a more active role until, gradually, they can take over and read it for themselves.

This apprenticeship approach can be taught to parents and provides a much more meaningful experience for children when they take books home. Without this emphasis, a significant number of parents can make reading a test of their child's skill, which results in tears all round. Also, it is important to recognise that there are different patterns of home literacy within the community (Heath 1983), and that in some cultures books are so revered that parents may be fearful of letting their children handle them.

Despite the popularity of the apprenticeship approach during the 1980s, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE 1998) has resulted in a return to a largely phonic-based approach, where texts are selected to meet specific learning objectives. However, the shared reading aspects of the 'literacy hour' do use 'real' books, and the literature selected by teachers for individual and guided reading generally incorporates well-designed, imaginatively illustrated texts. The NLS requires children to be introduced to a wide range of genres, including non-fiction texts and biographies.

Thus it can be seen there are strongly contested viewpoints on how children should learn to read. Like many such debates, this issue does not have one single solution. However, many practitioners recognise that using a combination of methods helps to address the different learning styles of the children they teach. When children are

experiencing difficulties in acquiring reading skills, individual support from within the school can help to address underachievement. Clay (1991) pioneered the Reading Recovery programme, which gives targeted children regular intensive help from an adult for a limited period of time to help them to catch up with their peers. This intervention has proved effective, but it is costly.

### Becoming a writer

Children across the world, whatever their circumstances, begin to make marks in the same way. Kellogg (1979) describes how children's drawing begins with scribbling. Studies show that children are not restricted to using writing implements: a baby may begin experimenting using their own fingers (such as making patterns in pools of food during mealtimes), and in less affluent societies children of various ages (and adult narrators) may compose their drawings with sticks in the dust. Early mark-making and drawing by even the very youngest children enable them to express their ideas and understandings in a symbolic manner (Matthews 1994).

While writing and drawing may appear to be human inventions rather than innate skills, some researchers have investigated their natural antecedents. Sheridan (2004) has suggested that there are neurological links between early scribbling behaviours and babbling, and research by Kennedy (cited in Zalewski 2002) showed that people blind from birth were still able to draw realistic interpretations of everyday objects. These ideas suggest that there may be an innate capacity in humans to develop mark-making skills as a form of communication.